

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

1. **(Currently Amended)** A thickening composition comprising a xanthan gum particles and a potassium salt,  
wherein said xanthan gum particles are coated with said potassium salt is attached to a powder surface of the xanthan gum such that when said coated xanthan gum particles are subjected to a 30-second vibration in a 60-mesh JIS standard sieve having an inner diameter of 150 mm at a vibration width of 2 to 3 mm and 3600 counts/min, the coated xanthan gum particles crushed by vibration that pass through the sieve are 20% by weight or less, and wherein xanthan gum particles without a potassium salt coating have a particle size finer than 60 mesh.
  
2. **(Currently Amended)** The thickening composition according to claim 1, wherein the coated xanthan gum particles having a potassium salt attached to a powder surface thereof is are prepared by a method comprising the steps of spraying a potassium salt solution onto the xanthan gum particles, and thereafter fluidizing and drying the sprayed xanthan gum particles to produce the coated xanthan gum particles.
  
3. **(Currently Amended)** The thickening composition according to claim 1, wherein the potassium salt is ~~attached to~~ coated on the xanthan gum particles, in an amount of 0.5 parts by weight or more and 7 parts by weight or less, based on 100 parts by weight of the xanthan gum particles.
  
4. **(Currently Amended)** The thickening composition according to claim 1, wherein when the ~~potassium salt attached~~ coated xanthan gum particles are is added in an amount of 1 part by weight based on 99 parts by weight of ion-exchanged water at 20°C, the xanthan gum is dispersed or dissolved without forming a lumpy mass, to reach 90% or more of a peak viscosity at 2 minutes after the addition.

5. **(Currently Amended)** A foodstuff ~~Foodstuff~~ comprising the thickening composition as ~~defined in~~ according to claim 1.
6. **(Cancelled)**
7. **(Currently Amended)** The thickening composition according to claim 1 ~~[[6]]~~, wherein the coated xanthan gum particles crushed by vibration that pass through the sieve are fine powder ~~crushed by vibration is 15% by weight or less of the thickening composition.~~
8. **(Currently Amended)** The thickening composition according to claim 1 ~~[[6]]~~, wherein the coated xanthan gum particles crushed by vibration that pass through the sieve are fine powder ~~crushed by vibration is 10% by weight or less of the thickening composition.~~
9. **(Previously Presented)** The thickening composition according to claim 1, wherein said potassium salt is one or more potassium salt selected from the group consisting of potassium chloride, monopotassium citrate, tripotassium citrate, potassium DL-hydrogentartrate, potassium L-hydrogentartrate, potassium carbonate, tetrapotassium pyrophosphate, potassium polyphosphate, potassium metaphosphate, tripotassium phosphate, dipotassium hydrogenphosphate, and potassium dihydrogenphosphate.
10. **(New)** A thickening composition comprising  
xanthan gum particles and  
a potassium salt selected from the group consisting of potassium chloride, monopotassium citrate, tripotassium citrate, potassium DL-hydrogentartrate, potassium L-hydrogentartrate, potassium carbonate, tetrapotassium pyrophosphate, potassium polyphosphate, potassium metaphosphate, tripotassium phosphate, dipotassium hydrogenphosphate, and

potassium dihydrogenphosphate, wherein said xanthan gum particles are coated with said potassium salt.

11. (New) The thickening composition according to claim 1, wherein the thickening composition consists essentially of coated xanthan gum particles and the potassium salt is selected from the group consisting of potassium chloride, monopotassium citrate, tripotassium citrate, potassium DL-hydrogentartrate, potassium L-hydrogentartrate, potassium carbonate, tetrapotassium pyrophosphate, potassium polyphosphate, potassium metaphosphate, tripotassium phosphate, dipotassium hydrogenphosphate, and potassium dihydrogenphosphate.